

SCOPE

AVILA COLLECTION

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Avila Creates the "Alive Woman"
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Avila Creates "The Alive Woman"—

By Patricia Jansen Doyle
(Education Editor of The Star)

ABOVE the Blue river valley on one of south Kansas City's highest, most scenic crests, four new buildings of dark brick banded with white concrete, classic in design, spread out like a contemporary acropolis.

The buildings form the first all-new campus of higher learning to be constructed in this city in a generation, and house the only women's college in this metropolitan area.

On the white iron entry fence, just off Wornall road at 119th street, the sunlight sparkles through translucent amber letters, turning them to gold. The shimmering letters proudly announce:

: :
: Avila College :
: :

"Avila?" you ask. The name, like the campus, is less than three years old and, consequently, is unknown to many who do not follow the rapid developments in higher education, especially among Catholic institutions.

Yet Avila college stems from a century of service by a congregation of nuns, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, in educating young women in this city.

IN 1866, five nuns traveled from St. Louis to this post-Civil war boom town, bustling with traders who, like the nuns, followed the new Pacific railway westward.

On Quality hill, where people of means settled, they founded a convent school, St. Teresa's



INTEREST BOILS AND BUBBLES in a psychology class at Avila. Dr. Rita Wetzel (right), associate professor, explains that human nature has certain basics, regardless of race or culture, which make it possible to devise tests that are widely applicable (Kansas City Star photographs by Murrell Bland).

academy, which in 1910 moved far southward to pasture land at Fifty-sixth and Main street before J. C. Nichols began developing the Country Club residential district around them.

A junior college, the College of St. Teresa, was opened on the same campus in 1916 and became a 4-year liberal arts college in 1940, winning full accreditation from the North Central association in 1946.

But cloaked in the shadow of the better-known academy, the college never caught fire in the imagination of Kansas Citians. So at the suggestion of Archbishop John P. Cody, who is now archbishop of Chicago, after he headed debate by the nuns, amid protests of some

alumnae, the college name was changed in 1963 in preparation for the move to a new campus.

There a new identity was to be built, in keeping with the changing role of woman in contemporary society.

THE NAME AVILA was the natural choice. It honored the Spanish birthplace of St. Teresa of Avila, the Catholic church's first woman scholar, who in the 16th century, burning with the spirit of reform within the church itself, revamped her religious community.

St. Teresa of Avila espoused the practical philosophy that before a miracle could take place a person must do everything humanly possible to bring

it about.

As Sister Olive Louise Dalavis, president of Avila college, frequently recalls, the saint said: "If a hungry man asks you to teach him to pray, first you feed him."

The miracle of Avila college is that it exists today.

"We are trying to build a college at a time when the odds are so strong against us," the president said, "but if we hadn't moved when we did, we would have gone under."

AMID THE vanishing supply of nuns, the rising costs for lay professors and with very little financial support from this community, the college leaders nonetheless began building afresh.

They purchased the picturesque 48-acre site—"right out from under my nose," developer Miller Nichols is reported saying—and now have completed about one-third of a 10- to 12-million-dollar building program.

By next fall Avila will have upgraded academic strength to the level where 42 per cent of the faculty hold Ph.D. degrees. And by then should begin rebuilding enrollment that dwindled under a series of temporary setbacks:

- The doubling of the college's tuition in the last five years.

- The tightening of admissions standards.

- The competition of the lowering of fees for suburbanites at Metropolitan Junior college-Kansas City and this fall for Missourians at the University of Missouri at Kansas City.

Once a streetcar school for Catholic girls who could not afford to go away to college, Avila now enrolls more than 300 full and part-time students of many faiths, ages and backgrounds.



STUDYING AT THE BUILT-IN DESK in a dormitory room is Miss Jill Helgersen of Wichita, a junior in special education.

AFTER ITS first try at nationwide recruiting, the Avila student body includes four foreign students, and 33 students from 13 states—from Massachusetts to New Mexico—in addition to large numbers from both Missouri and Kansas.

As a clear sign of rising quality, the Scholastic Aptitude test score averages of entering freshmen this fall rose 52 points over a year ago, standing at a respectable 500 points on a nationwide scale that runs from 200 to 800.

And Avila college is heart-

ened that since 1960, the college has produced five winners of Woodrow Wilson fellowships for graduate study, a number exceeding other Missouri women's colleges, such as Fontbonne and Maryville, each with two, and Webster, with three.

"A college must be a college," said Sister Olive Louise, as she explained that Avila college courageously flunked out students and turned away applicants when it desperately needed their funds.

KEEPING ITS liberal arts tradition, Avila college believes

Catholic College Susta

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most of its graduates, as future mothers, will be important links in transmitting culture to their children.

English, sociology, art, history and French are the most popular liberal arts majors.

But, attuned to the rise in women employment and volunteering, Avila also is preparing larger numbers for teaching, nursing and the business office.

Its nursing program, one of two bachelor's degree programs in Western Missouri, offers specialties in psychiatric, surgical, maternal-child care and community health nursing.

Its embryonic program for teachers of the mentally retarded is one of the few such programs in the Middle West, and the college will open next summer one of two centers in the United States for preparing teachers in the international Montessori method.

BUT ABOVE all else, Avila college is dedicated to creating what its president describes as "the alive woman."

"We need women who are aware of what is going on around them and want to better that world," said Sister Olive Louise, a youthful looking president in her early 40's. Her words on this subject carried an emphasis considerably stronger than the normal tones of the nun in black garb.

"Housework has been turned over to machines, so now woman can devote herself to the things that are more important . . . "We are convinced that our job in higher education is to develop girls who are leaders. Some challenge that statement. How can every woman

be a leader?" they ask. But we say that a woman can be a leader if she is moved by her convictions, and if she is responsible for her actions."

The freedom to inquire, to challenge, she said, molds that leadership.

In a psychology classroom where Dr. Rita Wetzel, associate professor of psychology, was discussing Rorschach tests, students buffeted her statements and those of her classmates.

"THESE STUDENTS are intellectually more motivated than those I taught at Florida state university," Dr. Wetzel said. "At the good school absences were tremendous, with lots of distractions, such as basketball games."

"Most of the young students at Avila are working their way through school, while the older women expand the areas of discussion by contributing their years of experience in rearing families."

"This is a place where you can express your opinions and not feel you are doing anything wrong," said Mrs. Helen Haglund, 9219 Wenona road, Leawood.

One of Avila's older women students, Mrs. Haglund, a registered technician now preparing for a new career in teaching, returned to college after her son earned a Ph.D. degree from the University of Leeds in England.

"I like the small college, the small classes, the intellectual freedom," she said. "There is a great deal of freedom here. Why, I am even a Presbyterian."

SOMETIMES Avila girls capture the spirit of "the alive woman" in unexpected ways. Disgruntled over the administration-selected visiting lectures last year—"they always wound up promoting the Papal Volunteers, or some such, until



SISTER OLIVE LOUISE, a former voice and vocal literature teacher, is Avila's youthful president.

we all stopped going," said one student—the girls took over the speakers' program this year.

Their first venture was a panel on birth control—a radical venture although conservatively packaged with four Catholic speakers.

ins 100-Year Tradition



SILHOUETTED IN AN ATRIUM against a landscape of black locust trees stripped bare by winter (above), are Miss Sue Audley, 19, of 6700 Metcalf, Overland Park, and Miss Christine Bell, 19, of 12824 West Seventy-first street, Shawnee, both sophomores. Above right is the Avila College seal, cast in bronze. It bears the college motto in Latin: "With God's help, there is nothing to fear."

During Oxford week, students flocked to lectures on variegated British themes, from imagery in "Macbeth" to education in England, and then swigged "near" beer in the pub fashioned in the student union.

Any success at student participation is a triumph, believes Miss Edith Messina, 407 West Eighty-sixth street, a 21-year-old English major and president of the Student Government association.

"It is a problem getting students involved because most of the 'day hops' have jobs," Miss Messina said. "They have to earn money so they keep on at this campus. Besides, we are all pretty individualistic here."

THIS STUDENT leader is one of the seniors who remembers that September in 1963 when the first two buildings of the new campus opened before they were finished.

Many panes of glass were not in the windows, and the campus was a field of mud being gouged out and moved about by bulldozers beginning the construction of two additional buildings.

"There was a time when we didn't open a door," Miss Messina said. "We just walked through the empty frame. In the basement (where a temporary lunch room was set up) single light bulbs were screwed into sockets, and someone was



always drilling overhead."

But the students enjoyed the atmosphere. Natural lighting streamed everywhere through the buildings in sharp contrast to the dreariness of the old campus. And the educational facilities were much better.

"We had a wonderful language laboratory instead of a couple of tape recorders," Miss Messina said.

CERTAINLY the new buildings are a major asset of the new Avila college campus. Architecturally chaste and graceful, the four new buildings are on a now grassy campus, edged on the east by a grove of black locust trees and a single, magnificent walnut tree.

The buildings are:

- Margaret O'Reilly hall, an academic building with science and language laboratories, a tiered lecture hall, assembly room, classrooms and a demonstration classroom where mentally retarded children are taught.

- Administration-library building with administrative offices, faculty rooms, a chapel and a 44,000-volume library.

- Carondelet hall, a 3-story dormitory with twin-bedded

rooms for 124 women.

● Marian center, a student center with a cafeteria for 350 students, snack bars, recreation rooms, alumnae lounge and a book store.

The four holdings represent an outlay of nearly 3½ million dollars, financed largely by the religious order, alumnae gifts and the federal government. The contribution from Kansas City's business and industrial community—typical of their sluggishness toward higher education here—has been slight, only \$270,000 or about 8 per cent of the total.

The investment includes \$1,200,000 from the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, \$1,089,000 in federal loans for the student center and dormitory, and \$1,000,000 in alumnae gifts and bequests, almost half bequeathed by the late Miss Margaret O'Reilly, who was the school's first junior college graduate in 1918.

AVILA COLLEGE is on the threshold of knocking on the doors of top business and industrial executives for \$165,000 to provide the one-third local share to match federal loans and grants for a \$650,000 fine arts building.

By 1971, the college hopes to have built a library housing 100,000 volumes; to increase its dormitory housing to 400 women, and build a faculty residence-chapel and a special education center for mentally retarded children.

The chaste buildings with their interior walls, light cream in color, accented with brick, dark wood paneling and tall windows, form an esthetically pleasing background for the colorfully dressed women students who come to school clad in everything from tailored suits and nylons to high above-the-knee skirts which

draw the eye to dark patterned hose and white courtage hools.

They are enveloped in a feminine atmosphere where beauty exudes from enameled contemporary sculpture, from plastic molded chairs, from crystal goblets tucked in the corner of window sills.

THE CRYSTAL, as well as china, gathered by patroness Margaret O'Reilly in her world travels, often are used at tea time. Everything is touched, clicked, used.

A grouping of fine antique furniture on an Anhussoo rug fill the entry hall of the Marian student center. The rug, hand woven in a tree of life pattern of pale blue, green, pink and beige, is reported to be larger than any Anbusson hanging in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Even the dorm rooms, on many campuses a jumble of books and clothes, are attractive rooms with a dividing unit housing study desks on one side, closets and a lavatory on the other, separating study from the sleeping area. An Avila girl can burn the homework lamp till dawn without disturbing a sleeping roommate.

Almost every building has expanses of grass, opening on to breathtaking views of the landscaped setting and fine housing of the new Verona Hills and Red Bridge housing developments.

In the academic building, four atria — glassy recesses with lounge seating—open onto small balconies. The cafeteria, with its rows of white tables, opens onto an enormous sun deck overlooking a panoramic view of Kansas City to the north, while sunken patios, sheltered by stone walls, invite students to read and relax outside the library and student

union.

Making for academic excellence is the fact that classes are relatively small. The student-teacher ratio is from 8 to 1 to 12 to 1, something unusual in an era of ever-swelling enrollments in many colleges.

FURTHERMORE, an atmosphere of wholesomeness, imbued with a moral and religious environment, are attractive to some parents of young women.

And, some say, the absence of male students makes it possible for the girls to dig more seriously into their textbooks and research and to speak up more assertively in the classroom.

Occasionally the usually cheerful face of Avila's president, Sister Olive Louise, squints into worry; but at the moment it radiates optimism.

Last week a consulting team of educators spoke encouragingly of the quality and promise of the academic program. Furthermore, second semester enrollment, which usually plummets on college campuses, held its own this month. It is a clear omen, Sister Olive Louise believes, that enrollments will begin to climb.

The president estimates that the present full-time enrollment of slightly over 200 students will rise to 800 to 1,000 by 1972.

"Like a business, the first two years are slim pickings," she said, "and where an institution is building a new image, the task often is more difficult than starting from scratch . . . we have to have patience."

The motto of Avila college, a Latin phrase from St. Teresa of Avila, symbolizes the college's courage and optimism: *Deo adjuvante non timendum*. In English it means "With God's help, there is nothing to fear."

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